

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ROUND TABLE

*Divided in its  
reaction to the  
League of Nations,  
the Round Table  
struggled to control  
events, but its  
moment was  
already passing,  
as was Britain's...*

*Part 4 of 4*

by Will Banyan

© April 2005

Email:  
banyan007@rediffmail.com

## THE ROUND TABLE AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

The Round Table's failure to achieve its primary objective of imperial federation is a significant fact, yet it is ignored by most New World Order researchers. Quigley, though, much to his credit, was not shy of addressing the issue with this trenchant observation: "...whether this group succeeded in transforming the British Empire into a Commonwealth of Nations or merely succeeded in destroying the British Empire is not clear, but one seems as likely as the other".<sup>124</sup> Arresting Britain's decline was the ultimate goal of these would-be elite conspirators, but the tide of history and the growing nationalism of the dominions were against them.

Events during the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference also signalled that there were growing limits to British power and Round Table influence. The catastrophic war against Germany and its allies had accelerated the erosion of Britain's global position. In fact, by the start of 1917 Britain was facing a financial crisis as its reserves of gold and American bonds became seriously depleted, impeding its ability to purchase much needed supplies from the United States. Britain's financial dependence upon the US had reached such a stage by mid-1917, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer had warned that US President Woodrow Wilson would soon be "in a position, if he wishes, to dictate his own terms to us".<sup>125</sup>

Fortunately for Britain, Wilson stopped short of using America's financial power to force both sides to mediate; instead US troops joined the war against Germany. But Wilson did exploit America's newly pre-eminent economic position to introduce on 8 January 1918, what he described as a "programme of the world's peace...the only possible programme..." the "Fourteen Points". The first four points were unashamedly internationalist, calling for the abolition of secret treaties, absolute freedom of the seas, the elimination of trade barriers and global disarmament. Most of the remaining points sought to redress territorial disputes within Europe, except for the fourteenth point, which set out Wilson's overall global vision: "A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike".<sup>126</sup>

Wilson's proposal was subsequently realised as a "League of Nations" at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The Round Table's response to this development is generally assumed to have been positive, although its role in the League's creation is disputed. Mainstream historians, such as Kandle, for example, claim the Round Table "had its major wishes fulfilled when both a League of Nations and a mandates system were established by the Peace Conference". Yet, he cautions, the Round Table's "actual effect" on the Peace Conference was "very little" and "should not be exaggerated".<sup>127</sup> Quigley, in contrast, maintains the Round Table had "a great deal to do with the formation and management of the League of Nations and of the system of mandates".<sup>128</sup> Outside of the ivory tower, David Icke goes further to claim the Round Table actually played a central role in the League's creation:

*Through Milner, [the Round Table] was the chief influence in the British War Cabinet of Lloyd George (Comm 300) in the First World War. It would dominate the British delegation at the 'Peace' Conference of 1919, when the shape of the post-war world and German reparation was being decided. It was also the major power behind the creation of the League of Nations, the first attempt at world government by stealth.*<sup>129</sup>

Which of these interpretations is most accurate? There is no simple answer, but as will become apparent, the Round Table attempted to shape the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference though not in ways most would expect. In fact there was an attempt by some

well-placed Round Table members to *weaken* the League of Nations. Though that action failed, the Round Table was arguably more successful in subverting the mandates system, transforming it into little more than a League-approved imperialist land-grab. This period would also reveal how divided the Round Table had become between imperialists and advocates of world government.

### A "LITTLE BODY OF ILLUMINATI"

The Round Table had reached the apex of its political power and influence during World War I. During the years 1916 to 1919 many Round Table members occupied senior positions in the government of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. This was no accident, for since January 1916 a number of key Round Table members, including Milner, Kerr, Dawson, Amery and Waldorf Astor had begun to cultivate the ambitious Lloyd George. Dining together every Monday, often at Amery's residence, the primary obsession of this so-called "ginger group" was the need to replace the then Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, with "firm leadership". For most Round Table members the obvious choice as Prime Minister was Milner. However an apparently blundered attempt by Dawson and Astor to convince Asquith to resign in favour of Milner merely paved the way for the more politically astute Lloyd George to assume the prime ministership in December 1916.<sup>130</sup>

Although Milner was trumped, Lloyd George's triumph was an immediate boon to the Round Table as its members joined the new government at a variety of levels. Milner was appointed to the five-member War Cabinet, initially as a minister without portfolio, but in April 1918 he became Secretary of State for War. Other Round Table appointments included: Philip Kerr as Lloyd George's private secretary and foreign policy adviser; Leo Amery as an Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet Secretariat; William Waldorf Astor was appointed as Lloyd George's Personal Parliamentary Secretary; Robert Brand, already serving on the Imperial Munitions Board based in Ottawa, was promoted to Deputy Chairman of the British Mission in Washington DC; and John Buchan joined Lloyd George's staff as Director of Information. Also joining the government was new Round Table member Alfred Zimmermann who was shifted from the Ministry of Reconstruction to the Political Intelligence Department at the Foreign Office in 1917. Only Lionel Curtis was excluded from Whitehall, retaining his teaching position at Oxford (and travelling to India in the meantime) until called upon in late 1918 to join the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.

The presence of so many Round Table members within Lloyd George's government, in the War Cabinet, Cabinet Secretariat, the Foreign Office and especially in his private secretariat or "Garden Suburb"—so named because they were housed in huts constructed in the garden of 10 Downing Street—did not pass unnoticed. In February 1917 one British journalist wrote scathingly of a "little body of illuminati" from "the class of travelling empirics of Empire, who came in with Lord Milner" and had now taken up residence in the "Garden Suburb", he argued, for the sinister purpose of

"cultivat[ing] the Prime Minister's mind".<sup>131</sup> Even some academic historians have concluded there was "a good deal of truth" (Lockwood) to these claims of "Fabian-like Milnerite penetration" (Naylor) of Lloyd George's government.<sup>132</sup>

More importantly, this "Milnerite" ascendancy came at the expense of the Foreign Office, which "might more properly have been described as a 'passed-over' department with little influence on the policy-making process".<sup>133</sup> Milner and his acolytes had justified their new dominance by painting the Foreign Office as incompetent. According to Kerr, the Foreign Office had "no conception of policy"; Amery accused it of a "general absence of definite purpose"; and Milner charged that its lack of "energy and promptness of action" was threatening Britain's interests.<sup>134</sup> With Lloyd George sympathetic to such sentiments, Round Table influence over British foreign policy only grew, much to the chagrin of the Foreign Office. Thus it was not surprising that in mid-1917, the Foreign Office's Permanent Undersecretary, Lord Hardinge was privately complaining about his experienced officials being sidelined while "amateur diplomacy holds the field".<sup>135</sup>

### A HOUSE DIVIDED

In view of the Round Table's rise to power it is ironic that it was divided on the question of the League of Nations. In fact some of its key members were deeply sceptical of Wilson's scheme. Milner had little faith in the concept, telling an associate in 1919 that he was "very doubtful about the success of the League of Nations". He believed the League could only work "by virtue of the influence of the British Empire and America", but without that support, "the larger League has no future".<sup>136</sup> Milner also cautioned Lloyd George against relying on the "shadow" of the League of Nations at the expense of the "substance" of the British Empire.<sup>137</sup> Amery was more scathing, dismissing the League on various occasions as "moonshine", "a farce", and a "sham structure".<sup>138</sup> In one acerbic communication to Lord Robert Cecil—later Britain's Foreign Secretary and co-author of the League covenant—Amery wrote: "leagues of peace, disarmament etc are all fudge". An unimpressed Cecil dismissed Amery's criticisms as "pure Germanism".<sup>139</sup>

Philip Kerr also had his doubts about the League. In articles he had written for *The Round Table* during the war, Kerr had endorsed Anglo-American cooperation and the spread of democracy as the basis for international peace. He had also focussed on recreating the so-called "Concert of Europe" that had kept the peace following the Napoleonic wars. In private discussions with the US Ambassador to Britain, Walter Page, Kerr had rejected the idea of a "peace league" in favour of a permanent great-power conference based on voluntary participation, no surrender of national sovereignty and an organisation that "would have no executive authority or military power". Kerr was, according to Egerton, "emphatically opposed to the plans for guaranteed or enforced peace now being propounded by pro-league groups in Britain and America".<sup>140</sup> In pursuing this course, observes Kendle, Kerr was "supported by the majority of the [Round Table's] London group".<sup>141</sup>

In view of the Round Table's rise to power it is ironic that it was divided on the question of the League of Nations.

But this scepticism about the League was not unanimous. Lionel Curtis was a keen supporter of the League as was Alfred Zimmern, whom Curtis admired because his mind was "not shaped in the iron Milnerian mould". It was through Zimmern that Curtis had joined the League of Free Nations Association, a pro-League group formed by Fabian Society member H.G. Wells.

The Association later joined with another group, the League of Nations Society—also dominated by Fabians including Leonard Woolf, author of *International Government* (1915)—to form the League of Nations Union (LNU). Curtis soon became a strong presence in the LNU, convincing Wells to adopt the Round Table's research methods, and driving its agenda towards supporting world government as the only means of eliminating war.<sup>142</sup>

The LNU later published its proposal, "The Idea of a League of Nations" in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1919. They presented the issue as a choice between "a general agreement on the part of mankind to organize a permanent peace" and the "progressive development of the preparation for war and the means of conducting war" that would "ultimately...destroy civilization". They also rejected as a "delusion" the notion that war could merely be restricted rather than abolished.<sup>143</sup>

Yet this "League of Nations project" would not only eliminate war forever, it would deliver "a new economic phase in history" in the form of "economic world-control". The League was no mere "little legal scheme", wrote Curtis, Zimmern and their fellow LNU collaborators, but a "proposal to change the life and mentality of everyone on earth".

They also claimed it was "fatuous" to "dream of compromises" with any "political institutions or social methods" that stood in the way of this project; such obstacles were presumably to be eliminated. The demands of their "World-League of Nations" project were enormous and could not be diluted: "it is either to be a great thing in the world, an overriding idea of a greater state, or nothing".<sup>144</sup>

Curtis had already spelled out his own ideas on the League in an article for *The Round Table*, "The Windows of Freedom" (December 1918). Curtis made three points. First, he made an impassioned plea for Anglo-American cooperation to ensure the League would function. The war had revealed to America "the world is one" and that it was "now impossible" to retain its policy of isolation. "Having put her hand to the plough, can [America] look back?", Curtis asked rhetorically. "Can she now go back to the plea that American interests are the dominating principle of her policy?"<sup>145</sup>

Second, he warned the League of Nations "will not constitute a world government", and would be little more than "scaffolding" until it was composed of popularly elected representatives who were able to levy taxes. In fact, until it had "developed the structure of a world government", a powerless League "plastered with phrases and made to look like stone" would become "the greatest danger which can threaten mankind". Although optimistic, the world would "live to see" a "Government speaking and acting in the name of mankind". Curtis cautioned: "the hour is not yet".<sup>146</sup> Finally, Curtis proposed a trusteeship system in which the League would direct certain powers to bring "peace, order and good government" to those "races who cannot as yet hope to govern themselves" in tropical Africa and the Pacific.<sup>147</sup>

Zimmern's article in the same issue of *The Round Table* was more effusive in its support for the League of Nations. A true ideologue, Zimmern claimed the "real work" of the "coming age" was to "moralise" states both internally and externally, as "[b]etter States" would create "better citizens" who were "more public-spirited" and "fully-conscious of their obligations". When all states were dominated by such "civic dedication", only then could the "machinery of the League ever develop into the organic union or world-State to which all students of the political affairs of mankind are bound to look forward to".<sup>148</sup> Continuing this theme, Zimmern averred:

*It is only by the co-operation of States which have common ideals that the new world order can be built up, and the idea of the commonwealth, the principle of the conscious and responsible co-operation of the citizen in the making of laws by which he is bound, is the only possible foundation for the world-State of the future.*<sup>149</sup>

The other purpose of Zimmern's article was to influence the deliberations of the Paris Peace Conference. Thus to achieve the third of Wilson's Fourteen Points—which called for the "removal...of all economic barriers" and the global "equality of trade conditions"—Zimmern recommended creation of a "permanent commission on Commercial Practice". Much like the World Trade Organisation of today, this proposed body would address "controversies on tariff discrimination, dumping and similar questions".<sup>150</sup> Zimmern even warned of the "dangers" to civilisation posed by "international syndicates" and "international trusts" who were becoming "real and serious rivals to the power of free governments".

Although he noted the "[m]eans...exist for controlling them", it was "too early" to describe those controls.<sup>151</sup>

Of these it was Curtis's article—subsequently reprinted in the *New York Times* (21 December 1918) and published by the LNU as its first study—that was the most influential. General Jan Smuts and Lord Cecil, key contributors to the League of Nations Covenant, both drew on Curtis's paper; and it was on the strength of "The Windows to Freedom" Cecil had invited Curtis to join the League of Nations Section at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>152</sup> Fate though, had decreed that it was the League sceptics—Milner, Kerr and Amery—who had the ear of Lloyd George, not Curtis.

## WEAKENING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

The position of Philip Kerr is perhaps the most important in this episode as he was the closest Round Table member to Lloyd George. As the private secretary and foreign policy adviser to Lloyd George from 1916 to 1921, Kerr's influence has been much debated. Recent academic accounts paint Kerr as the "gatekeeper" (MacMillan) and "intimate companion" (Warman) to Lloyd George, who was able to manipulate him with ease due to his absolute control over the flow of information to the Prime Minister.<sup>153</sup> Some contemporary observers, however, suggested Kerr's influence was exaggerated. As Thomas Jones, Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, for example, observed in 1917: "Kerr pumps things into [Lloyd George] and he seems to agree and then he goes and does the opposite".<sup>154</sup>

In the case of the League of Nations, however, it is clear that Kerr's influence over Lloyd George was more substantial than not. This is confirmed by a little-known incident in January 1919, when

The position of Philip Kerr is perhaps the most important in this episode as he was the closest Round Table member to Lloyd George.

at Kerr's instigation Lloyd George attempted to force Cecil—Britain's representative at the League negotiations—to make substantial changes to the League Covenant.

Kerr had been attempting for quite some time to seek Lloyd George's support for a less ambitious League arrangement. In December 1917, for example, Kerr had suggested that Lloyd George support the creation of a "League of Allied Nations" based on the Supreme War Council at Versailles as the centrepiece of any post-war arrangement. Kerr advocated transforming the Supreme War Council into a "permanent international agreement" that would commit the Allies to enforcing the peace settlement, though they would only need to meet "from time to time".<sup>155</sup>

A particular concern of Kerr was Wilson's insistence on territorial guarantees, automatic sanctions against violators of the international peace, and that League members would have a compulsory obligation to uphold the Covenant. Kerr had repeatedly warned that "no international machinery or treaties" could guarantee international peace; only a less ambitious permanent conference, based in Versailles, and comprised of representatives of the "Greater States" could deliver.<sup>156</sup> Kerr's influence eventually bore fruit when in December 1918 Lloyd George declared in a War Cabinet meeting his view that the League "must not be constituted as a body with executive power" but as a body "whose authority rested with governments".<sup>157</sup> In short: national sovereignty was *not* to be compromised.

Unlike Lloyd George, the British representative in the League negotiations, Lord Robert Cecil, was more sympathetic to Wilson's vision and had prepared a draft covenant—the 'Cecil-Miller' draft—to that end. It was because that draft went well beyond what the Imperial War Cabinet had authorised, that on 31 January 1919 Lloyd George had confronted Cecil with a list of changes. That list was in fact a memorandum prepared by Philip Kerr. The Kerr memorandum rejected the collective security program embodied in Wilson's original proposal for territorial guarantees and upheld by the Cecil-Miller draft. Instead it argued that if the League attempted to "impose obligations" on members to "go to war in certain stated conditions", it would result in the "destruction of the League itself". The only real option was a system of "continuous consultation" among the nations of the world, with solutions to each crisis to be decided on a case-by-case basis; the "paper obligations" the League members entered into should be "reduced to the absolute minimum..."<sup>158</sup>

Cecil, who was due to meet with Wilson in a matter of hours, chose to totally disregard Lloyd George's new instructions. Believing Lloyd George's "thoroughly bad" plan to be part of a French plot to delay resolution of the League question—rather than a Round Table plot to weaken the League of Nations—Cecil also kept details of the confrontation secret from the American delegation.<sup>159</sup>

## THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

This was perhaps a wise move on Cecil's part as Wilson was already suspicious of Milner and his acolytes. In a private discussion with future Rockefeller aide Raymond B. Fosdick while en route to the Paris Peace Conference, for example, Wilson had dismissed Milner as "a Prussian".<sup>160</sup> Wilson also opposed the cultural formula for Anglo-American unity—the centrepiece of Cecil

Rhodes's vision—telling a British diplomat in December 1918 the British should not describe Americans as their cousins or brothers, as they were "neither". Due to its ethnic diversity the US could not be part of any Anglo-Saxon world, Wilson argued. Only a "community of ideals and interests" could form the basis of an Anglo-American alliance.<sup>161</sup>

As chairman of the commission at Versailles charged with drawing up the League Covenant, and aided by a sympathetic Cecil, Wilson was in a good position to prevail. According to Knock, there was a "fair measure of congruence" between the original Wilson-House draft covenant of August 1918, and the covenant produced by the League Commission in February 1919. In fact it could be argued the League Covenant had been "thoroughly reconstructed along Wilsonian lines".<sup>162</sup>

It is therefore ironic that while the London branch of the Round Table failed to make the League more compatible with British imperialism, it was a group of Americans sympathetic to Anglo-American unity who succeeded in crippling Wilson's creation.

Lead by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, a majority of US Senators put forward a plethora of reservations. Their primary aim was to ensure that American freedom of action at home or abroad would not be restricted by joining the League of Nations. Wilson, though, refused to compromise and on 8 March 1920, the US Senate rejected membership of the League Covenant.

The failure of the US to join the League has been celebrated by many

New World Order researchers as a triumph of popular will over elite hegemony. This might be an erroneous assumption. Lodge had long been close to former President Theodore Roosevelt and a number of his acolytes, including naval strategist Captain Alfred T. Mahan and the author Brookes Adams. Roosevelt openly admired Cecil Rhodes's "great and striking conquest for civilisation" in southern Africa, which he hoped to duplicate in Latin America and the Pacific.<sup>163</sup>

Adams endorsed an "Anglo-Saxon coalition" to check German and Russian ambitions; while Mahan advocated an "Anglo-American re-union", especially a naval alliance, as the two powers "united upon the ocean" would be "all-powerful there".<sup>164</sup>

In the 1890s Roosevelt, Lodge, Mahan and Adams had often met in the Metropolitan Club in Washington DC to discuss the virtues of America becoming an imperialist power.<sup>165</sup> They were also close to the business community, especially J.P. Morgan.<sup>166</sup> As President (1901-1909), Theodore Roosevelt had maintained his imperialist impulse. Declaring himself an "expansionist" he had sought to establish the US as a world power. Inevitably, until his untimely death in 1917, Roosevelt was one of the most vehement critics of Wilson and the League of Nations. Roosevelt's preference, curiously enough, was for a "League of Allies".

It is perhaps no coincidence that in the same month as the final Senate vote that Philip Kerr wrote a lengthy piece in *The Round Table* finding favour with the Lodge-Roosevelt approach while rejecting Wilson. The League Covenant had "aimed too high and too far", Kerr observed; it was also now apparent that support for the League from "one of its most important members"—the US—was "very unlikely". In fact: "The emphasis of public sentiment in *all nations* is now on the *rights of national sovereignty*, rather than on international right..."<sup>167</sup>

**The failure of the US to join the League has been celebrated by many New World Order researchers as a triumph of popular will over elite hegemony. This might be an erroneous assumption.**

Kerr acknowledged that joining the League required "*the complete abandonment* of the doctrines of the Fathers of the American Republic" and credited the US Senate with expressing "the real sentiment of all nations with hard-headed truthfulness". Few nations were genuinely willing to subordinate their "national sovereignty to an international code and an international ideal". The United States, Kerr wrote, had "reaffirm[ed] the principle of national sovereignty *as over-riding the ideal of world government* enforcing a world interest..."<sup>168</sup>

Believing popular support for the League was waning, Kerr argued the "proper course" was to "revise and restate" Britain's League policy. He suggested three guidelines for Britain's League membership. Britain should: (1) avoid any "general obligations"; (2) not make any commitments beyond its capabilities; and (3) "definitely denounce the idea" that the League could enforce its rules by "military or economic pressure on recalcitrant States". For Kerr there could be no alternative course because the "influence of the League of Nations upon British Imperial relations has for the moment been misleading and dangerous".<sup>169</sup>

#### MANDATE FOR EMPIRE

One area where the imperialist faction of the Round Table did secure a victory was on the issue of League mandates. The Round Table had a key role in formation of the concept. Curtis had proposed a trusteeship system for "derelict territories", arguing that the only hope of these races who cannot as yet govern themselves or ever learning to do so is in tutelage by some great democratic civilised nation". Through such a system the League would "render obsolete the old, pernicious idea of empire..."<sup>170</sup> Kerr had also been contemplating the issue and was "against handing back the colonies" Britain had seized from Germany. He supported "civilised control over politically backward peoples" as Africans and many Asians had "proved unable to govern themselves". The solution he sought was for European powers to intervene and protect these peoples from "demoralising influences".<sup>171</sup>

Additional work was being done by the Round Table's primary US member, George Louis Beer (one of Kerr's recruits), who now served on "The Inquiry" as its colonial expert. Beer's correspondence with Curtis and two other Round Table members had produced the idea of the US having mandates over former German colonies in East Africa. At the Paris Peace Conference in December 1918, Beer had taken Curtis to meet with senior US representatives Colonel House and General Tasker Bliss to sell the idea. Curtis also talked with Milner, Kerr and Lloyd George as well about the proposal. Beer appeared to be successful when Wilson announced on 30 January 1919 that the US would accept mandates.<sup>172</sup>

This moment of triumph for Beer soon unravelled when it became apparent Britain and France had already secretly divided the spoils of war. According to Kendle, Milner as the newly-appointed Colonial Secretary was "at the heart of things and deeply involved". This was no understatement: Milner was personally

conducting the "out of court" negotiations with the French at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>173</sup> He was also chairman of the commission established at the Peace Conference to draft the mandates putting him in a "commanding position".<sup>174</sup>

Kendle suggests that Milner was defying Round Table views on the mandate but this is doubtful for there was no firm consensus. Moreover, Milner had always been an imperialist and suddenly overcame his previous reluctance to acquire new territory now that Germany was defeated. He had advocated American acquisition of mandates as a means of establishing a "bond of union...between the United States and [Britain]". But he had little time for Wilson's dreams of "self-determination" and actually opposed giving the US mandates in East Africa arguing that it would deprive Britain of a vital line of communication running the length of Africa.<sup>175</sup>

The rewards of this venture were, for Britain, France and some other powers, substantial. One obvious result, in the words of Lord Balfour, was "a map of the world with more red on it". Milner seemed untroubled by his efforts; but a confused Curtis suffered a nervous breakdown and retreated to Morocco to recuperate.<sup>176</sup> Beer accepted the position of chairman of the Permanent Mandates Commission, even though he despised the outcome of the Peace Conference. He died suddenly in March 1920. In its tribute to him the Round Table admitted that Beer was its "American correspondent" and praised him as "an internationally minded man" who was "the centre of a considerable group of men whom his criticism and advice had a powerful influence".<sup>177</sup> That influence, however, clearly had its limits. Whitney Shepardson, an American Rhodes Scholar and intimate friend of Curtis, took his place.

#### THE "INTERNATIONAL ANGLOPHILE NETWORK"

The political defeat of the Round Table's world government faction at Paris merely followed the severe blows

administered to the movement as a whole by the First World War. The war, according to Kendle "had had a disastrous effect on the movement". Many members in the dominion branches, especially in Canada and Australia, had been lost in the war. Added to the public controversy stirred up by publication of Curtis's incendiary *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, more members were lost than gained causing some groups to collapse. Round Table groups in India and South Africa soon disappeared, while the remaining members in New Zealand succumbed to apathy.<sup>178</sup> The movement was not dead, though its members moved off in different directions adapting to the changed world of the 1920s and 1930s.

According to Quigley, the Round Table was transformed into an "international anglophile network". This process was led by "the mastermind", Curtis—"who established, in England and each dominion, a front organisation to the existing local Round Table Group". The main fronts were the Royal Institute for International Affairs (RIIA or Chatham House) in Britain and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR) in the US.<sup>179</sup> Though mocked in some quarters, Quigley's record of events is accurate on many counts.

The main fronts were the  
Royal Institute for  
International Affairs  
(RIIA or Chatham House)  
in Britain  
and the Council on  
Foreign Relations (CFR)  
and Institute for Pacific  
Relations (IPR) in the US.

In May 1919 Curtis returned to Paris where he called a meeting at the Majestic Hotel. Thirty members of the British and US delegations participated. Curtis had proposed that a committee be formed to "prepare a scheme for the creation of an institute of international affairs". He justified this proposal with the argument that as the Peace Conference had revealed: "Right public opinion was mainly produced by a small number of people in real contact with the facts who had thought out the issues involved".

Curtis had then suggested creation of an "institute of international affairs" with "one branch in England and the other America" to ensure that expert opinion could be cultivated.<sup>180</sup> Sure enough at subsequent meetings of this Majestic-thirty group in June 1919 the committee recommended formation of an "Institute of International Affairs" with two branches, one in Britain and the other the US.<sup>181</sup>

Out of the deliberations of this Majestic-thirty, the RIIA and CFR emerged to take their respective places in the British and US foreign policy establishments. They were not only led and dominated by Round Table members in their early years—Curtis, Zimmern and Kerr at Chatham House, and Whitney Shepardson at the CFR—but subscribed to many of the Round Table's goals. "The foundation of Chatham House", Curtis acknowledged in 1938, "was a necessary *tactical change* to effect the same strategic object" as the Round Table.

The "time is gone", Curtis wrote to Kerr in 1936, "...to be afraid of admitting...that Chatham House was the outcome of Round Table work".<sup>182</sup> Both organisations also retained the Round Table's divisions; advocates of world government co-existed with proponents of a world order built on an Anglo-American alliance.

Despite their differences, the ties between the core Round Table group members endured in other forms, most notably the so-called "Cliveden Set". During the inter-war years Milner (before his death in 1925), Kerr, Brand, Dawson, and Curtis were regular visitors at the palatial residence of Waldorf Astor at Cliveden.

Due to the higher political circles the Astors mixed with, the suspicion that greater intrigues were underway at Cliveden soon gripped the public imagination. The dominant theory, advocated by Claude Cockburn, editor of the political newsletter *The Week* in the 1930s, claimed there was in fact a "Cliveden Set" intent on appeasing Nazi Germany.

This was not without foundation—Philip Kerr had endorsed accommodating Nazi objectives in Eastern Europe, and had most of the "Set" agreeing with him until Nazi aggression became too serious a challenge to appease.<sup>183</sup>

There were other ventures involving the Round Table remnants. In the late 1930s Kerr and Curtis were both heavily influenced by Clarence Streit's book *Union Now* (1939). Streit, an American Rhodes Scholar and *New York Times* journalist, had recommended "the union now of the United States with other Democracies, under one Federal Union Government, as a practical first step toward World Federal Union..."<sup>184</sup> Kerr had made many similar proposals during the 1930s and in July 1939 he and Curtis had supported the establishment of the Federal Union movement.

As Britain's Ambassador to the US from 1939 to 1940, Kerr had continued to support closer Anglo-American co-operation. In 1940 he seemed to resurrect Cecil Rhodes's ideas with his advocacy of a

"standing council in Washington representing all the states of pan-America and the British Commonwealth" and a "Pan-American British Empire Conference".<sup>185</sup> Kerr would never see his vision realised, however, dying unexpectedly on 12 December 1940 while visiting Britain.

As an organisation, however, the period from the 1920s onward was marked by the decline of the Round Table. Dawson resigned as editor of the *Times* in October 1941 and died in November 1944. Amery, increasingly impatient with Curtis's wild schemes, had drifted away to become a member of parliament.

Curtis, though, had become embroiled in a number of clashes with the new younger members of the movement who disagreed with his views. Nevertheless Curtis stuck doggedly to his faith in world government through some form of imperial federation as the path to world peace; a view he maintained until his death in 1955.

As for the other Round Table members, Brand and Zimmern, the shift in world power following World War II seemed to hasten their own shifts into obscurity. *The Round Table* journal also changed, losing its anonymity by the 1960s and becoming more a venue for ideas on the Commonwealth than a platform for a secretive elite clique.

### A LEGACY OF DECLINE?

The Round Table's main legacy has been its unintentional role in hastening the replacement of the Empire with the Commonwealth of Nations. This is clearly ironic, given that the aim of its members was the exact opposite, and reveals that their cherished propaganda methods were also somewhat less effective than they realised.

Moreover, the Commonwealth—being little more than a portentous name attached to those dominions and colonies that once formed the British Empire—has struggled to establish itself as an effective international organisation.

Commonwealth leaders have made many optimistic declarations about the Commonwealth's pivotal global role. In 1966, Commonwealth Secretary-General Arnold Smith claimed an essential global role for the Commonwealth in promoting more "understanding and tolerance". Smith argued, "We have to develop quickly the habits and insights of co-operation on a global basis. The Commonwealth gives us one of the promising instruments for this purpose". While one of his later successors, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, at the 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban, suggested a world leadership role for the Commonwealth with his claim that, "In a very real sense the Commonwealth is now a club of democracies".<sup>186</sup>

Yet, as a successor to the British Empire, the Commonwealth, as a number of commentators have ruefully observed of late, is a very poor substitute. "[I]t lacks much relevance in today's world...", claimed a scathing editorial in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* after the annual CHOGM meeting—then scheduled to be held in Brisbane, Australia, in September 2001—was cancelled in the wake of the terrorist attacks on America. The *Courier-Mail* continued, "It cannot enforce discipline among its own members when they abuse human and property rights (as in Zimbabwe) or devalue their democratic institutions (as in Fiji). And now it has, in effect, acknowledged that it would contribute little to the struggle against terrorism".<sup>187</sup>

**As an organisation, however, the period from the 1920s onward was marked by the decline of the Round Table.**

## ANGLOSPHERE: THE RESURRECTION

The divisions within the Commonwealth, particularly between the former dominions with large Anglo-Saxon populations and the former colonies where most of the population is indigenous, have not gone unnoticed by those seeking a reprise of the Rhodes-Milner vision of a racially and culturally homogenous federation. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, a number of federalists proposed consolidating the Anglo-Saxon members of the Commonwealth. One Canadian supporter suggested forming a "CANZUK Union", comprising Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.<sup>188</sup>

The real initiative, though, has been taken by those seeking to resurrect the original Rhodes-Stead dream of the unification of the United States with the British Empire. Since the 1990s an increasing number of Anglo-Saxon enthusiasts on both sides of the Atlantic have called for a "grouping that is natural rather than artificial" through "some form of unity between countries of the same legal and political—and linguistic and cultural—traditions..." Robert Conquest of the Hoover Institution, for example, endorsed the merging of the US with Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada into an "English-Speaking Union", which would act as "a model and centre from which the eventual progress of the entire world may proceed".<sup>189</sup>

Other advocates include the now-disgraced media mogul Conrad Black, political commentator John O'Sullivan, policy analyst John Hulsman, and journalist James Bennett. The objective is known as "Anglosphere" and proponents believe that "network civilisations" are emerging using technological innovations in travel and communications to link nations together on the basis of culture rather than geography. One of these "network civilisations", they contend, is the English-speaking Anglosphere.<sup>190</sup>

Since 9/11 the notion of Anglosphere has gained considerable currency. More than a few commentators observed that the partnering of the US and Britain to invade Iraq in 2003 with substantial assistance from relatively few allies other than Australia, made it more of an "Anglo-Saxon" exercise than any of the other formulations the Bush Administration tried to popularise. Tensions between Europe and Britain over its relationship with the US have also contributed to this idea that Britain and America's embrace may tighten at the expense of the European Union. Moreover, the overtly imperialist policies of the Bush Administration have raised the spectre of an American Empire dominating the world. There is still scope for a reversal, but it seems that over a century after his death, the dreams of Cecil Rhodes—of Anglo-American unity and imperial expansion—have had new life breathed into them.

## CONCLUSIONS

If there can be said to be an enduring bequest to the New World Order by the Round Table, it is providing an organisational blueprint. The Round Table is arguably the father of the plethora of think-tanks and unofficial policy-planning organisations we see around the world today.

All the features that distinguished and were pioneered by the Round Table—including exclusive membership, private off-the-record meetings, financial support from the business community, a focus on changing elite rather than popular opinion and a high-profile periodical—have been adopted by countless other organisations around the world. Perhaps the most important of these organisational successors to the Round Table include the Council on Foreign Relations, Chatham House, the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderbergers and the World Economic Forum.

It is therefore a bitter irony of history that the Round Table organisation, a posthumous product of Rhodes money and idealism, which still exists and still publishes its periodical, should be so marginalised at a time when the idea which motivated its founders has found new life. But this probably reflects the fundamental reality that formation and objectives of the Round Table were in fact "an admission of weakness". According to Norman Rose in his book *The Cliveden Set*:

*It reflected a widespread premonition that Britain was falling behind in the great power race. Anxious to keep up with the future giants, Germany and the United States, their projects were designed to preserve in time a status that was fast disappearing—as it happened, forever. On every count their game plan was doomed to failure ... Dominion nationalism was on the rise... Nor would it fade away... it flowered, leading the Commonwealth down a different road from that intended by Curtis and his followers...<sup>191</sup>*

By the time the Round Table had been formed in 1909, Britain's moment as a great power had already passed. As this series has sought to illustrate, despite their valiant and conspiratorial efforts, Rhodes, Milner, Curtis and their cohorts were too late to save the Empire and create the English-speaking union that they believed would bring peace to the world. Instead, primary responsibility for establishing the New World Order was to fall to elite groups within the United States.

Britain's destiny then, as now, was to become a junior partner in a program for global control largely devised and implemented from Washington DC, rather than in London.

*Pax Americana* was the future. Britannia would rule no more...

## About the Author:

Will Banyan, BA (Hons), GradDip (Information Science), is a writer specialising in the political economy of globalisation. He has worked for local and national governments as well as some international organisations and the private sector. He is currently working on a revisionist history of the New World Order and an analysis of the War on Terror. Banyan's six-part series, "Rockefeller Internationalism", was published in NEXUS 10/03–11/02. Will Banyan can be contacted by email at [banyan007@rediffmail.com](mailto:banyan007@rediffmail.com).

## Endnotes:

Due to the large number of references, and the lack of available space, readers desiring access to footnotes and references will have to access the full series of articles from our website.

Perhaps the most important of these organisational successors to the Round Table include the Council on Foreign Relations, Chatham House, the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderbergers and the World Economic Forum.